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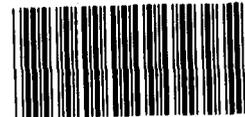
United States General Accounting Office

Briefing Report to the Honorable
Henry B. Gonzalez, House of
Representatives

September 1991

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Cost Estimates for Two Proposed Park Facilities in Texas



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United States
General Accounting Office
Washington, D.C. 20548

Resources, Community, and
Economic Development Division

B-245153

September 3, 1991

The Honorable Henry B. Gonzalez
House of Representatives

Dear Mr. Gonzalez:

This report responds to your request that we analyze the cost estimates for the proposed visitor center at San Antonio Missions National Historical Park in San Antonio, Texas, and a headquarters/visitor center and separate maintenance facility at Big Thicket National Preserve, which is north of Beaumont, Texas. We briefed your staff on July 17, 1991, and this briefing report summarizes our overall analysis of the cost estimates as presented during that briefing.

In summary, the San Antonio facility is primarily a visitor center with a limited amount of administrative space. The center will provide interpretative services on the historical significance of the four Spanish colonial missions surrounding San Antonio. The Park Service's initial cost estimate for the San Antonio Missions visitor center is \$8.63 million. To date, approximately \$200,000 has been appropriated for planning and design work.

The Big Thicket facilities will consist of a headquarters/visitor center and a separate maintenance facility. The headquarters/visitor center will provide primarily administrative space, which will allow Park Service personnel to locate within the preserve, and will also provide interpretative services for visitors on the unique biological features of the preserve. The separate maintenance facility will also allow maintenance workers to locate within the preserve. The Park Service's initial cost estimate for the Big Thicket facilities is \$8.41 million. To date, approximately \$564 million has been appropriated for planning and about \$3.1 million has been appropriated for the maintenance facility.

Proposed Visitor Center at
San Antonio Missions National
Historical Park

San Antonio Missions was established in 1978 to provide for the preservation, restoration, and interpretation of four Spanish colonial missions in Texas. The park consists of the missions and the historical areas associated with them, and Park Service officials estimate the park receives about 1 million visitors per year. Currently, visitor accommodations and interpretive services to enhance the visitors' experience are limited. Construction of a visitor center has been proposed to increase the level of interpretation and educational opportunities offered at the park. To date, no money has been appropriated for construction. Table 1.1 shows, by construction activity, the total estimated cost of the visitor center.

Table 1.1: Park Service Estimates of San Antonio Missions Construction Costs

Dollars in Thousands

<u>Construction activity</u>	<u>Cost</u>	<u>Description of work</u>
General site work	\$1,240	Road and utility relocation
Site work for visitor center	806	Landscaping to create "park-like" appearance
Visitor center construction	2,400	Building construction
Interpretation	<u>1,180</u>	Sophisticated audio-visuals and displays
Net construction subtotal	\$5,626	
Project supervision and construction contingencies	<u>1,744</u>	31% allocated to all construction costs
Gross construction subtotal	\$7,370	
Planning and design costs	<u>1,256</u>	Engineering drawings and archaeological review to be conducted
Total	<u>\$8,626</u>	

Note: Park Service "Class C" estimates. Class C estimates are the Park Service's initial estimates of a project's design and construction costs.

Since the visitor center will be constructed in an urban setting, it will require extensive general site preparation --approximately \$1.24 million, according to Park Service estimates. Space and traffic considerations require that the roads and utilities be relocated to provide adequate space for the visitor center and its grounds. General site preparation also includes restoration of the area previously covered by the road and construction of a bike path.

Additional site work for the visitor center will include landscaping and construction of walks and parking areas. This work is estimated to cost \$806,000. Because of the extent of infrastructure adjustments, significant landscaping will be needed to create a "park-like" appearance. In addition, foundation work, visitor walks, and a 140-car and 14-bus/recreational vehicle parking lot will be placed near the building.

The visitor center itself will contain 10,500 square feet and include exhibit areas, a 150-seat theater, public rest rooms, and Park Service office space. Approximately 69 percent of the square footage in the visitor center will be visitor accommodation and interpretive space. The remaining 31 percent of the space will be administrative space used by the Park Service and Los Compadres--a nonprofit organization and concessioner currently operating in the park.¹ The Park Service estimates that building construction will cost \$2.40 million.

Visitor center interpretive displays will include audio-visual exhibits in the lobby as well as archaeological exhibits. The theater will have a sophisticated projection system that simultaneously uses three projectors in its presentation. The Park Service estimates that producing interpretative displays for the visitor center will cost \$1.18 million.

The Park Service adds 31 percent of construction costs to all of its construction projects to pay for project supervision (15 percent) and potential construction contingencies and cost overruns (16 percent). This adds \$1.74 million to the cost of the visitor center.

¹Los Compadres donates its profits from concession activities to the park.

The estimated planning and design costs for the visitor center are \$1.26 million. This includes all engineering drawings, all design for interpretive displays, a detailed archaeological review of the site, and extensive administrative reviews by local and state historical commissions. To date, \$200,000 has been appropriated for planning.

Proposed Headquarters/Visitor
Center and Maintenance Facility
at Big Thicket National Preserve

Big Thicket was established in 1974 to protect and promote the unique biological diversity of southeastern Texas. The preserve, which receives about 90,000 visitors per year, has 11 individual units that are spread out over 7 counties in southeastern Texas. Currently, the preserve has limited visitor facilities at a 600-square-foot cabin. The current preserve headquarters and maintenance facility are located outside of the preserve in Beaumont, Texas. The Park Service plans to build both a headquarters/visitor center and maintenance facility at a central location in the preserve. Table 1.2 shows, by construction activity, the total estimated costs of the headquarters/visitor center and maintenance facility.

Table 1.2: Park Service Estimates of Big Thicket
Construction Costs

Dollars in Thousands

<u>Construction activity</u>	<u>Cost</u>	<u>Description of work</u>
General site work	\$ 287	Clearing of lot and development of utilities
Site work for headquarters/visitor center	469	Parking area and final grading
Headquarters/visitor center construction	2,265	Building construction
Interpretation	800	Audio-visuals and displays
Maintenance building	1,375	Workshops, vehicle work bays
Maintenance area	<u>537</u>	Employee parking, storage sheds, fueling station
Net construction subtotal	\$5,733	
Project supervision and construction contingencies	<u>1,777</u>	31% allocated to all construction costs
Gross construction subtotal	\$7,510	
Planning and design costs	<u>900</u>	Engineering drawings
Total	<u>\$8,410</u>	

Note: Park Service "Class C" estimates. Class C estimates are the Park Service's initial estimates of a project's design and construction costs.

Design and construction of the facilities at Big Thicket will be done in two phases. Phase I will consist of the maintenance facility and Phase II the headquarters/visitor center. The Park Service estimates that it will cost \$8.41 million to design the two phases and construct the facilities. To date, \$564,000 has been appropriated for planning, and Phase I has received \$3.10 million in construction funds.

The Park Service estimates that general site preparation for the two phases will cost \$287,000. Funds will be used to clear the lot, construct roads, and develop utilities. The site is not connected to water or sewer lines, so a well will be drilled and a septic system installed. Site work includes construction of a parking area, foundation work, and final grading, and is estimated to cost an additional \$469,000.

The headquarters/visitor center will contain 16,638 square feet. Approximately 68 percent of the building will be used for Park Service staff currently located outside the preserve in Beaumont, Texas. The remaining 32 percent will be for visitors and will include an information area, an exhibit area, an 88-seat theater, and public rest rooms. The Park Service estimates the headquarters/visitor center will cost approximately \$2.27 million.

The maintenance facility is estimated to cost approximately \$1.38 million. This building will include workshops, administrative space for the maintenance crews, and vehicle work bays.

The site work for the area around the maintenance facility is estimated to cost an additional \$537,000. This work includes construction of an employee parking area, storage sheds, and a fueling station.

The Park Service's 31-percent allocation for project supervision (15 percent) and potential construction contingencies and cost overruns (16 percent) adds \$1.78 million to the total project cost. The total design cost for both phases is \$900,000. This includes engineering drawings and interpretive design. Minimal archaeology is planned for the site because it is not historic, and very little review of the design by local and state commissions is anticipated.

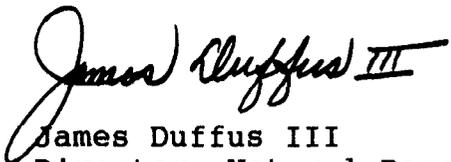
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We performed our work at the Park Service's headquarters in Washington, D.C., and at the San Antonio Missions National Historical Park and Big Thicket National Preserve. We also met with staff from the Park Service's Denver Service Center, which is responsible for conducting planning and developing design plans and cost estimates for all Park Service construction projects over \$200,000. We did not assess the validity of any of the cost estimates provided to us by Park Service officials.

As you requested, we did not obtain official agency comments on a draft of this briefing report from the Department of the Interior. However, we did discuss the facts presented in this briefing report with Park Service officials, who agreed with these facts. Our review was performed in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards in June and July 1991.

As agreed with your office, we plan no further distribution of this briefing report until 30 days from the date of this letter. At that time we will send copies to the Secretary of the Interior and make copies available upon request. If you have any questions concerning this briefing report, please call me at (202) 275-7756. Other major contributors to this briefing report are listed in appendix I.

Sincerely yours,



James Duffus III
Director, Natural Resources
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